

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-07

INFO OCT-01 SS-14 ISO-00 NSC-05 NSCE-00 INR-05 CIAE-00

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FM AMEMBASSY MANAMA BAHRAIN

TO SECSTATE WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY 2709

INFO AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI UAE

AMEMBASSY CAIRO EGYPT

AMCONSUL DHAHRAN SAUDI ARABIA

AMEMBASSY DOHA QATAR

AMEMBASSY JIDDAHSAUDIHARABIA

AMEMBASSY KUWAIT KUWAIT

AMEMBASSY MUSCAT OMAN

AMEMBASSY TEHRAN IRAN

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 MANAMA 0037

LIMDIS

USCINCEUR FOR GENERAL HUYSER

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS : PFOR, BA

SUBJECT : BAHRAIN POLITICAL CLIMATE: 1976 COMES IN LIKE A LAMB

SUMMARY: WITH LEFTISTS WELL IN HAND IF NOT IN JAIL, GOB
FACES LITTLE APPARENT POLITICAL DISCONTENT FOUR MONTHS AFTER
THE DISSOLUTION OF PARLIAMENT. POPULACE APPEARS TO BE WILLING
TO GIVE AL KHALIFA REGIME A YEAR OR SO TO PRESS ON WITH
WIDELY APPROVED ADMINISTRATIVE AND ECONOMIC REFORMS. ALTHOUGH
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GOVERNMENT IS TRYING HARD, ITS FINANCIAL AND HUMAN RESOURCES

ARE LIMITED. WE SUSPECT PUBLIC DISSATISFACTION WITH IMPLEMENTATION OF ECONOMIC AND DEVELOPMENT POLICIES WILL SOON EMERGE AND SUBSEQUENTLY PRESENTLY QUIESCENT POLITICAL AND LABOR ISSUES WILL RE-EMERGE. WHILE AL KHALIFA REGIME CONTINUES TO INSIST PUBLICLY ON ITS DETERMINATION TO RESUME DEMOCRATIC EXPERIMENT, WE DETECT LITTLE SERIOUS PLANNING TO DATE ALONG THESE LINES. WE ARE CONCERNED LEST AMIR AND PRIME MINISTER OVERCONFIDENTLY DALLY IN REINSTITUTING SOME FORM OF DEMOCRATIC REPRESENTATION UNTIL THEIR HAND IS FORCED IN A TIME OF INTENSIFIED POLITICAL TENSION. PART OF AL KHALIFA STRATEGY FOR KEEPING THE LID ON AT HOME IS TO PURSUE CAUTIOUS, LOW PROFILE FOREIGN POLICY, EMPHASIZING SOLIDARITY WITH NEIGHBORS. IN THIS LIGHT WE SEE LITTLE PROSPECT FOR REVERSAL GOB DECISION ON U.S. NAVY DEPARTURE IN ABSENCE OF PUBLIC SAUDI AND IRANIAN SUPPORT FOR NAVY PRESENCE. END SUMMARY

1. FOUR MONTHS AFTER AMIR DISSOLVED BAHRAIN'S FIRST NATIONAL ASSEMBLY, THE POLITICAL ATMOSPHERE REMAINS REMARKABLY CALM. CERTAINLY THE BASIC SECURITY SITUATION SEEMS WELL IN HAND WITH THE AL KHALIFA REGIME KEEPING A CLOSE WATCH ON BAHRAIN'S SMALL BUT TROUBLESOME LEFTIST GROUPS. THE REGIME APPEARS TO BE TRYING TO KEEP THE LEFTISTS OFF BALANCE BY RELEASING, THROUGH A NATIONAL DAY AMNESTY, SOME OF THE 24 LEFTISTS WHO WERE STILL IN CUSTODY AS A RESULT OF THE AUGUST SECURITY ARRESTS WHILE ARRESTING PROMINENT LEFTIST MUHSIN MARHUN, A MEMBER OF THE DISSOLVED NATIONAL ASSEMBLY, FOR ANTI-REGIME STATEMENTS PUBLISHED IN KUWAIT. ALTHOUGH REGIME INSISTS THAT IT INTENDS TO ADHERE STRICTLY TO THE LETTER AND SPIRIT OF THE CONSTITUTION EXCEPT FOR PROVISIONS DEALING WITH THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY, IT HAS ALREADY MADE CERTAIN TECHNICAL VIOLATIONS BY DELAYING APPEAL HEARINGS FOR THE DETAINEES. THE GOVERNMENT APPEARS SUPREMELY CONFIDENT IN ITS ABILITY TO COPE WITH THE LEFTISTS AND IN NO MOOD TO SEEK RECONCILIATION WITH THEM ALTHOUGH IT CONTINUES TO BE CAUTIOUS ABOUT TAKING FOREIGN POLICY POSITIONS WHICH WOULD GIVE THE LEFTISTS ADDITIONAL PROPAGANDA AMMUNITION. THIS IS ONE OF THE REASONS THE GOVERNMENT FEELS LOCKED INTO ITS DECISION TO TERMINATE U.S. NAVY PRESENCE IN BAHRAIN IN 1977.

2. IN MEANTIME, GOVERNMENT STILL APPEARS ALMOST COCKY IN ITS CONVICTION THAT PRESENT ECONOMIC REFORMS AND VAGUE FUTURE

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PROMISES OF DEMOCRATIC PARTICIPATION WILL KEEP MODERATE BAHRAINIS QUIESCENT. WHILE TOP GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS FROM TIME TO TIME STATE PUBLICLY THAT BAHRAIN WILL SHORTLY RETURN TO SOME FORM OF DEMOCRATIC REPRESENTATION, WE SEE NO EVIDENCE OF ANY SERIOUS PLANNING TO DATE IN THIS REGARD. IN DISCUSSIONS WITH AMBASSADOR, AMIR CERTAINLY EVIDENCES NO HASTE TO RUSH BACK TO A PARLIAMENTARY SYSTEM AND THERE STILL SEEMS TO BE A CERTAIN CASUAL AL KHALIFA TOYING WITH CONCEPTS OF A "CORPORATE STATE" IN WHICH

VARIOUS INTEREST GROUPS WOULD BE REPRESENTED ON CONSULTATIVE COUNCILS. IT IS DIFFICULT TO GAUGE THE DEGREE OF IMPATIENCE WITH WHICH MODERATE BAHRAINIS VIEW THE GOVERNMENT'S TEPID ENTHUSIASM FOR DEMOCRACY SINCE THE PRESS IS BEING FIRMLY CENSORED AND BAHRAINIS OF LIBERAL BENT ARE CAREFULLY AVOIDING STICKING THEIR NECKS OUT PUBLICLY.

3. WE SUSPECT, HOWEVER, THAT MODERATE OPINION IN BAHRAIN IS PREPARED TO GIVE THE GOVERNMENT A YEAR TO IMPLEMENT ADMINISTRATIVE AND ECONOMIC REFORM FREE OF THE IRRITATIONS OF PARLIAMENTARY POLITICAL DEBATE. THE GOVERNMENT'S CONTENTION THAT THE PARLIAMENT WAS OBSTRUCTIVE IN GETTING ON WITH NEEDED ACTION IS HARDLY PLAUSIBLE. THE MAIN CAUSE FOR DELAYS IN HOUSING PROGRAMS, EFFECTIVE PRICE CONTROL, CODIFICATION OF COMMERCIAL PRACTICES AND PROVIDING MORE EFFECTIVE GOVERNMENT SERVICES WAS, AND REMAINS, THINNESS OF THE HIGHER BUREAUCRATIC LEVELS OF THE GOVERNMENT AND A RESULTANT INABILITY OF OVERWORKED MINISTERS TO DEAL PROMPTLY AND EFFECTIVELY WITH PRESSING PROBLEMS. THE AL KHALIFA REGIME ASSESSES ACCURATELY THAT THE POPULACE GENERALLY IS PRESENTLY MORE CONCERNED WITH INADEQUATE HOUSING AND INFLATION THAN WITH THE THEORETICAL CONFLICT BETWEEN PUBLIC SECURITY AND PERSONAL FREEDOM. PRIOR TO THE ASSEMBLY'S DISSOLUTION ITS MEMBERS OF ALL POLITICAL PERSUASIONS EXPRESSED QUITE VOCALLY A ROUGH CONSENSUS ON WHAT THE GOVERNMENT MUST DO TO IMPROVE SOCIAL/ECONOMIC CONDITIONS, AND THE GOVERNMENT DID NOT DISAGREE. HENCE, MOST BAHRAINIS SEEM PREPARED TO GIVE THE GOVERNMENT SOME TIME TO PUT ITS HOUSE, AND ESPECIALLY THEIR HOUSING, IN ORDER.

4. SINCE SEPTEMBER, THE AMIR AND HIS GOVERNMENT HAVE WORKED HARD AND, ON THE WHOLE, IMPRESSIVELY AT IMPLEMENTING CRASH DEVELOPMENT AND ECONOMIC AND ADMINISTRATIVE REFORM POLICIES. ON BAHRAIN'S FIFTH NATIONAL DAY LAST MONTH THE AMIR MADE A CONFIDENTIAL

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SPECIAL AND WELL PUBLICIZED POINT OF VISITING HOUSING AND OTHER DEVELOPMENT SCHEMES AND IN AN ADDRESS TO THE CITIZENS EMPHASIZED THE GOVERNMENT'S CONCERN FOR THEIR MATERIAL WELFARE. THE NEW ECONOMIC AND PUBLIC SERVICE MINISTRIES ARE NOW MORE OR LESS

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ACTION NEA-07

INFO OCT-01 SS-14 ISO-00 NSC-05 NSCE-00 INR-05 CIAE-00

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FM AMEMBASSY MANAMA BAHRAIN

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INFO AMEMBASSY ABU DHABI UAE

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C O N F I D E N T I A L FINAL SECTION OF 2 MANAMA 0037

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ETAFFED AND A NUMBER OF LONG OVERDUE COMMERCIAL AND ADMINIS-
TRATIVE LAWS HAVE BEEN ISSUED BY DECREE. THE HOUSING PROBLEM
IS RECEIVING INTENSE THOUGHT AND SOME ACTION, WHILE PRICE
CONTROLS ARE BEING APPLIED MORE BROADLY AND EFFECTIVELY.

5. BUT THE GOB IS FAR FROM OUT OF THE WOODS IN SUCCEEDING
WITH ITS POLICY OF INTENSIFIED REFORM. THE GOVERNMENT'S MORE
DIRECT INTERVENTION IN THE ECONOMY HAS OF COURSE CREATED
FRICTION BETWEEN COMPETING INTEREST GROUPS. AS GOB OIL REVENUES
THREATEN TO LEVEL OFF, THE COST OF THE PRICE SUBSIDIES AND EX-
PANDED PUBLIC SERVICES THREATEN TO STRAIN BUDGET RESOURCES.
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HOPED FOR SAUDI FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE, LIKE LONG-DESIRED U.S.
TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE, HAS BEEN SLOW IN COMING. THE GOVERNMENT'S
HOUSING AND SEWAGE PROJECTS ALONE PRESENT A COST OF ALMOST A
HALF BILLION DOLLARS IN THE NEXT FIVE YEARS WHICH MUST BE MET
LARGELY BY FINANCING BY ABROAD. WE QUESTION WHETHER THE

GOVERNMENT'S PERFORMANCE IN ECONOMIC/SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT AND REFORM WILL MEET THE EXPECTATIONS OF THE CITIZENRY.

6. WHEN THE REGIME'S HONEYMOON WITH PUBLIC OPINION ENDS, THE AL KHALIFA MAY WELL REGRET NOT HAVING A PARLIAMENTARY BODY TO BLAME THINGS ON. AS PUBLIC DISCONTENT WITH GOVERNMENT ECONOMIC AND ADMINISTRATIVE POLICY GROWS, PRESENTLY QUIESCENT POLITICAL ISSUES, SUCH AS THE DEMAND FOR PROTECTION OF CIVIL LIBERTIES AGAINST STATE POLICE POWER AND THE DESIRE FOR A FREE AND ASSERTIVE LABOR MOVEMENT WILL LIKELY RETURN TO THE FOREFRONT. BEFORE THIS MOMENT COMES, THE REGIME WOULD DO WELL TO HAVE A CREDIBLE AND RESPONSIVE PLAN FOR RESTORING SOME FORM OF DEMOCRATIC PARTICIPATION IN BAHRAIN. OUR GUESS IS THAT THERE WILL BE SUBSTANTIAL PRESSURE ON THE REGIME TO COME FORWARD WITH SUCH A PLAN BY EARLY SUMMER. WE ARE FAR FROM CONVINCED THAT THE AMIR AND PRIME MINISTER RECOGNIZE THE NEED TO MOVE SO QUICKLY AND WORRY LEST THEIR OVERCONFIDENCE CATCH THEM SHORT.

7. DESPITE APPEARANCES OF SOME OVERCONFIDENCE IN ITS ABILITY TO DEAL WITH DOMESTIC AFFAIRS, THE AMIR AND HIS GOVERNMENT APPEAR FULLY CONVINCED OF THE NEED FOR A CAUTIOUS, LOW PROFILE FOREIGN POLICY. INCREASINGLY SINCE INDEPENDENCE, THE GOB HAS FELT THE NEED TO ADJUST ITS FOREIGN POLICY POSITIONS TO MINIMIZE ITS FORMER "COLONIAL" CONNECTION WITH THE WEST AND TUCK ITSELF DEEPER INTO THE ARAB AND GULF FOLD. PART OF THE AL KHALIFA REGIME'S CONFIDENCE IN BEING ABLE TO DEAL WITH DISSIDENCE AT HOME IS ITS DETERMINATION NOT TO LET FOREIGN POLICY ISSUES CONTRIBUTE TO DOMESTIC POLITICAL TENSION. HENCE, ON ISSUES SUCH AS INTRA-ARAB DISPUTES OVER PALESTINE QUESTION AND HIGHLY PUBLICIZED CONFRONTATIONS IN THE AAN THE GOB WILL CONTINUE TO SEEK THE LOWEST POSSIBLE PROFILE. IN KEEPING WITH THIS POLICY, SO LONG AS SAUDI ARABIA AND IRAN OFFER NO PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR CONTINUED U.S. NAVY PRESENCE IN THE GULF, THE AMIR OF BAHRAIN AND HIS GOVERNMENT WILL LIKELY FEEL UNABLE TO REVERSE THEIR DECISION TO TERMINATE OUR NAVY'S PRESENCE IN BAHRAIN BY MID-1977.

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